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`Let religious body vet documents first'

Farrah Naz Karim; June Ramli

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Participants at an Islamic conference on HIV/AIDS today called for a local religious body to vet all documents before they are released.

One of the participants, Islamic Medical Association member Dr A. Majid Katme, said this was necessary since it was impossible for a consensus to be reached on issues discussed due to the highly differing opinions and thoughts.

He said since some papers tabled could be against the teachings of Islam, like those on the use of condoms, transexualism and sexual orientations, Malaysia as the host of the Second International Muslim Leaders' Consultation on HIV/AIDS must ensure that the documents were vetted.

He named the Islamic Development Department (Jakim) and muftis as parties who could undertake the responsibility.

"We simply cannot make halal what is not. There is no way we can accept homosexuality or encourage the use of condoms outside of marriage," he said.

The conference's International Advisory Committee chairman, Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir, commenting on the call, said the question should not even be raised as the participants themselves comprised reputable ulama and religious leaders from all over the world.

"Recommendations made through workshops and discussions were from a majority of the participants. That's why we see a diversity of recommendations, from the most liberal to the moderate and the very extreme," she said.

Marina added that Jakim, which is the event's co-organiser (with the Malaysian AIDS Council), would naturally play a major role in studying the recommendations.